



SAY: Welcome and thank you for joining us for a discussion on the Heroes' Narrative.

## TRAINING AGENDA

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### Heroes' Narrative

- Why narratives matter?
- Elements of an Epic Story
- Case Studies
- The Heroes' Narrative
- Examples

SAY: The goal of this workshop is to walk through the elements of an epic story and how these components can increase the power of the narratives we tell in our work.

## TRAINING OBJECTIVES

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- Explore why narrative, values, and stories matter and win campaigns
- Understand the six elements of an epic story and how to use them
- Discuss how narrative strategies win campaigns and build strength around a progressive vision

[www.heroesnarrative.org](http://www.heroesnarrative.org)

# **HEROES' NARRATIVE**

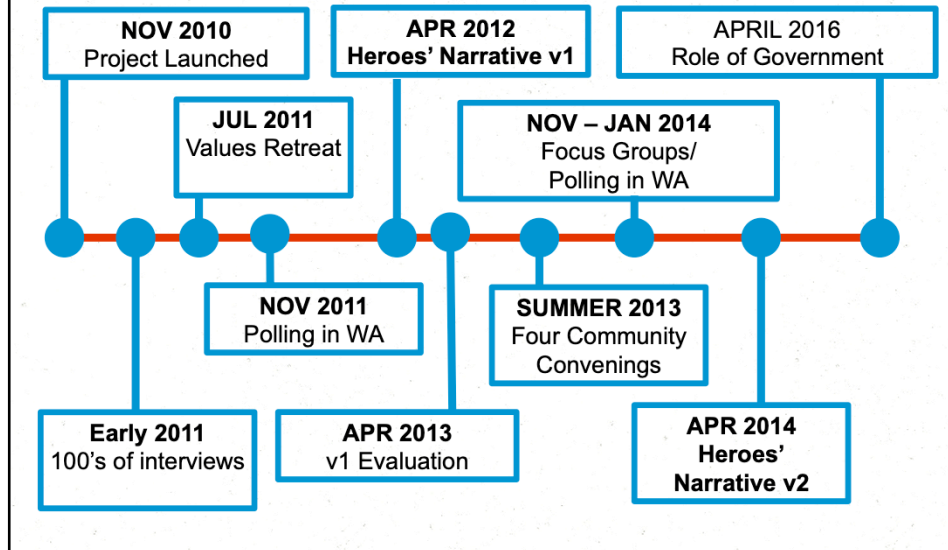
## THE STRENGTH IN YOUR STORY

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“The stories speak to something inside us that wants to know how our world lives, that wants to make order of it and find some **meaning**. Myths fulfill that in a way that science and facts don't always do, because science and facts don't always give us **meaning**.”

– Joseph Campbell

## HEROES' NARRATIVE



## Success in Washington

“I like this legislation, but bring it  
back in the Heroes’ Narrative.  
That’s what works.”

-Rep. Frank Chopp, WA State Democratic Speaker  
of the House

- Honest Elections Seattle
- Washington Voting Justice Coalition
- All In For Washington
- Countless narrative projects for partner organizations and emerging leaders



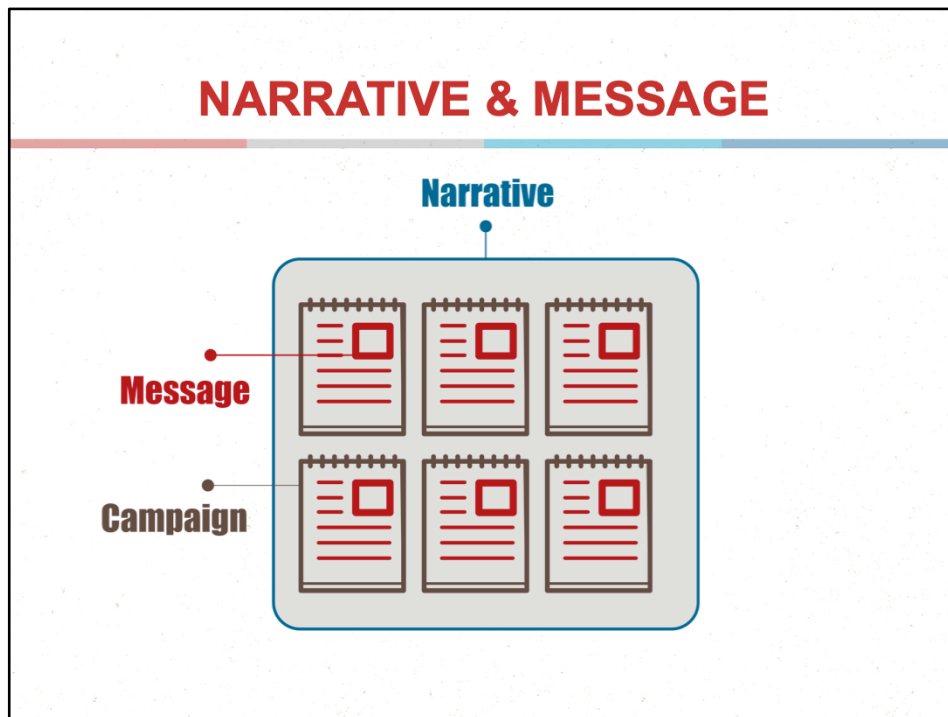
Throughout today's conversation – think about a campaign you're currently working on and take notes to start drafting the story.

SAY: **For over 30 years now**, the other side has been telling a values based story about America. They have been saying that government is the problem, that we are all going it alone, and that a free market is the solution to all of our problems. From Ronald Reagan to Ted Cruz, this narrative has been pervasive and consistent.

There are three outcomes to their quest, which define their version of America: Moral families, a free market, and the strongest military in the world.

The other side's story has become so pervasive that it **has consistently defeated our issue-based communications** and defeated us before we've even had the chance to get started. Before we start some of our campaigns we've actually already lost. We poll things that test well from the other side's narrative and then use them to our own short and long-term detriment.

Now, with this specific project, we are using the power of **Our Heroic Story to take back our state**, our future, and build powerful organizations across the state. We are seeing how powerful this tool is in other states and today we're going to show you how and why it works and how we can begin telling a new story.



SAY: First, it's important to understand that narrative and message are not synonymous.

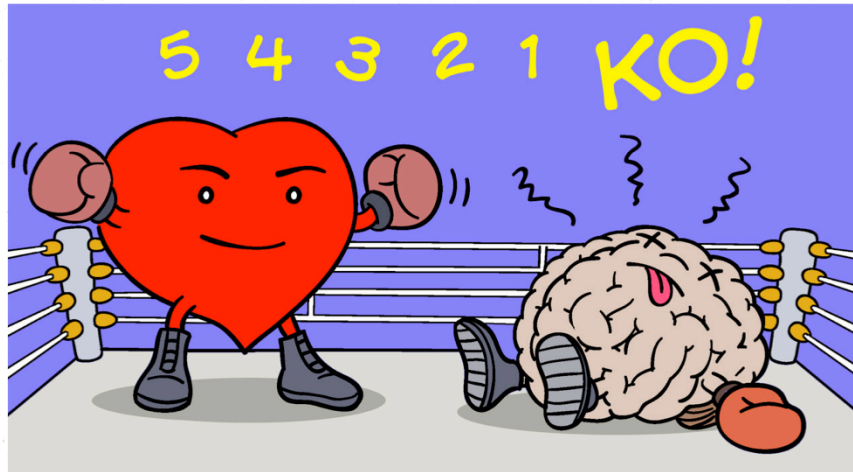
We use message all the time. **A good message has to do two things:** Capture and keep voter's attention and lead to desired action. This is true whether you are trying to win a campaign or sell soap.

But narrative is different.

A good narrative is a message, plus more. It accomplishes all the desired results of a strong message, but **adds a larger context to the story**. It creates emotional draw, helps many **campaigns tell a common story, and builds power over time**. Talking points shouldn't just serve the policy goal, it should serve the larger story that's based in values.

We accomplish this with a foundation of values and an understanding of our power cycle.

## VALUES



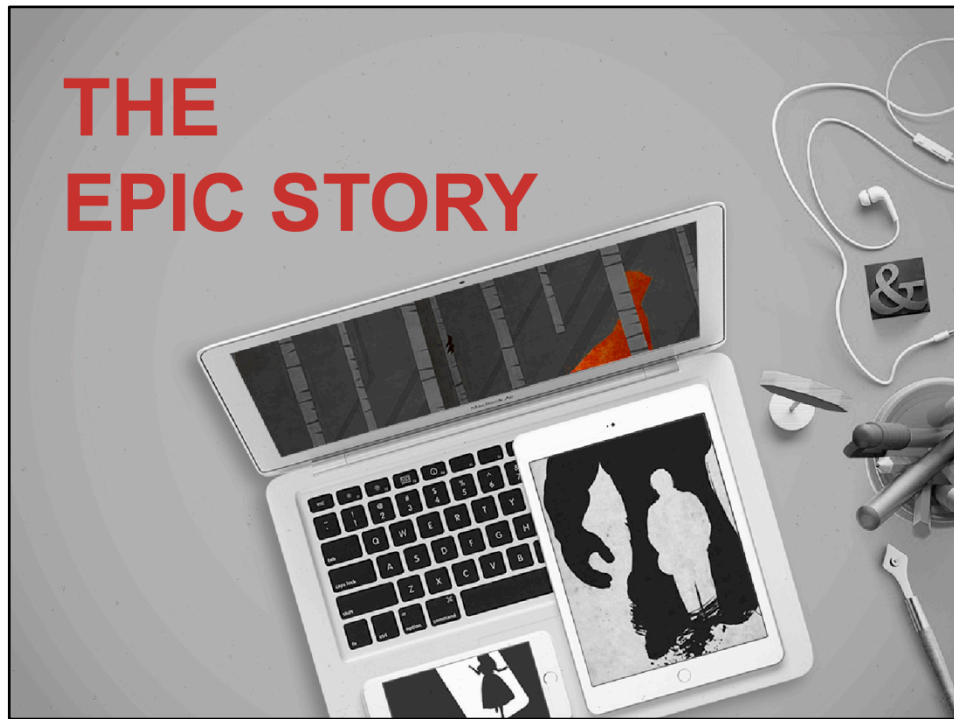
Speak to your audiences' hearts to change their minds.

Historically, progressives have run campaigns that are based on facts and policy abstractions. **Facts and policies** do not speak to the emotional part of our brain that makes decisions; they don't motivate us to act. That's because humans have lizard brains. Human beings are not rational whether we like to think so or not, we operate on emotions. **The lizard brain** is the term for the physical part of your brain, the pre-historic lump near the brainstem that is primarily responsible for visceral feelings that influence or even direct our decisions. Once we've made up our **minds emotionally** about a candidate or an issue, we actually seek out facts that confirm what we already believe.

The rational mind that has been the foundation of our movement's storytelling is a myth.

Values speak to this part of our brain that is actually making our decisions. **Values allow us to feel something, rather than just thinking about it.** Values are the foundation of the narrative.

Most Americans spend roughly five minutes a week thinking about all matters of public policy. **Audiences aren't really listening** to you when you talk about policy. In our fragmented world, values persuade fast and are our most strategic route to persuade others to join us. We have a very small window to engage folks.



ASK: What are the dominant narratives in your community? How are they impacting progress? (5 min)

## STORY ELEMENTS



SAY: How do we build the power of participation? We do this through the epic elements of story.

There are basic elements in every epic story, lessons we can learn when telling political narratives to supporters. They are as old as campfires and as new as last summer's Hollywood blockbuster. Why? Because they work.

This is how the human brain processes information. We gravitate towards stories and narratives are those stories we need to be telling. I'm going to show you how each epic element works, in both stories and politics and how we can apply these basic techniques to your work.

There are 6 elements that are shared by every epic story.

SAY: The six elements epic stories are -

Quest

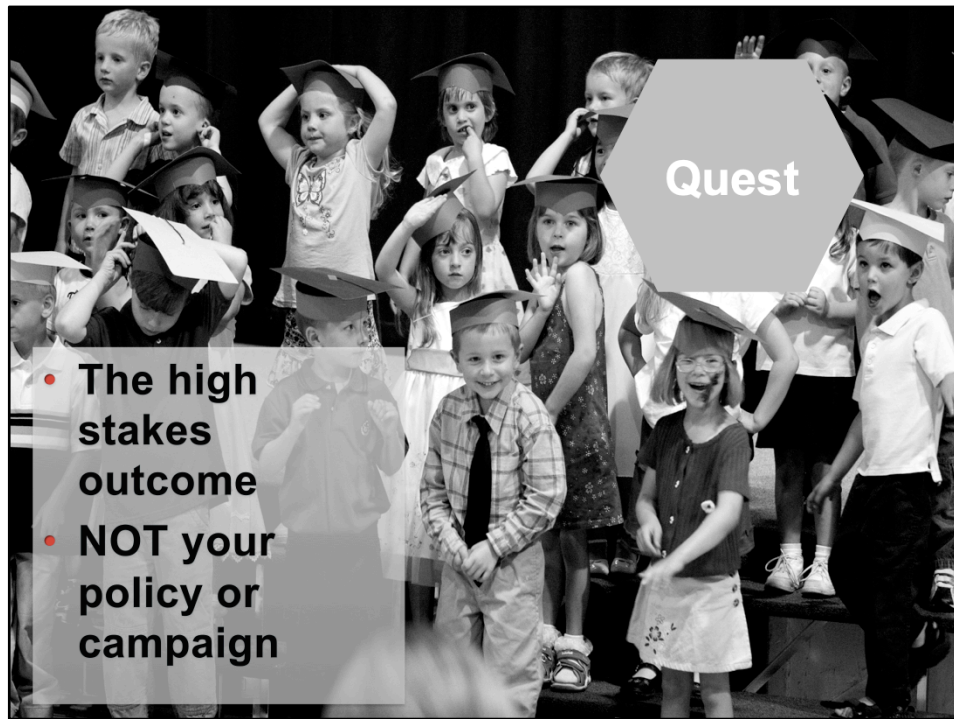
Threat

Hero

Heroes' Tool

Villain

Villain's Weapon



SAY: The quest is very broad, long term goal. The quest defines what matters to us. It's the frame for the story, it has to be high stakes, and it's always framed around our values. The most compelling stories are those with an epic quest, where the hero is going after something big.

In Star Wars, the quest is to restore freedom and justice to the galaxy.  
The quest goes beyond any specific policy.

SAY: This [insert issue/campaign] isn't really about [policy goal], it's about creating a better world and society.  
After passing [policy goal] we'd think about what our next step would be in achieving our quest.



SAY: The threat, or the “call to action”, is a crucial component of a narrative. The threat is the danger posed by the villain. It is big, close to home, and calls the hero to action. This is something screenwriters tell at the beginning of every movie. You tend to have a reluctant hero who is called to action by the threat. This is true in politics as well. We have a whole lot of reluctant heroes in America.

In Star Wars, the threat is takeover and destruction of the galaxy.

Every story needs a threat, we need it to show the change and transition in our hero.

Unfortunately, a lot of times progressives only talk about the threat and that actually drives down participation by making the status quo seem like the only option, “this is just how things are.”

We always need to end talking about the threat saying that it doesn't have to be this way.

We have to make the threat come alive for our audience, we can't leave it in a broad concept, we must localize it.

For someone who is unemployed living in Detroit where a big developer is coming in for a project and there is no CBO, the threat comes alive when that person isn't able



SAY: Heroes are the heart of the story, everything revolves around them. We need to invest time in finding and developing actual heroes for our story; real, relatable people from our audiences. This is important because it should prevent us, smart communicators, from putting policy or facts at the heart of the story. The policy is never the hero. The hero is the shoes that the audience will put on and use to travel through the story.

Good heroes have two things:

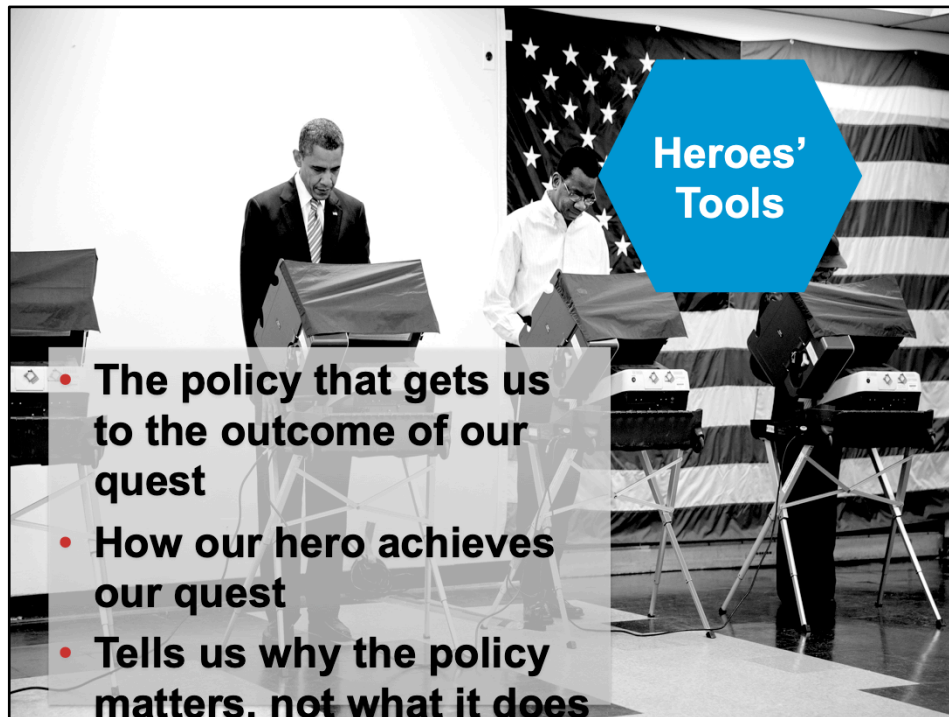
Values: a strong sense of right and wrong and a willingness to fight for what's right  
Strength - they're good at something. Epic heroes often have day jobs, but their pride in their ability and sense of doing what's right leads to heroic behaviors.

Heroes never stop trying to get back on their feet, even when hard times knock them down. Heroes are people who work together to make things better.

The hero is not someone who is fighting for a policy, they're someone who needs the policy in order to achieve their quest.

Heroes can be caring parents, working moms, responsible business owners, workers standing together to make their voices heard.

Make sure heroes every day people and not just validators like business owners, priests, etc.



SAY: So now we have a quest, a threat, and a hero. What's missing is the hero's tools.

The hero's tools are how we talk about our policies in a values-based way that will allow our hero to succeed. These tools are designed to add to our power cycle.

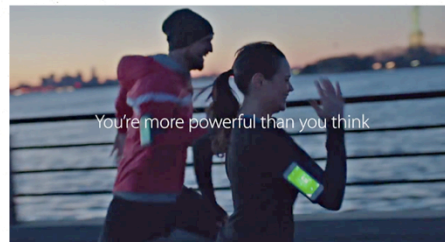
By doing it this way, we make sure that our policies are always in service to our audience. And they have to also contribute to our hero's ability to achieve the quest by contributing to the power cycle.

We need to tell our audience why the policy matters and how it will better their lives, not just what the policy does.

We need to introduce policies more in a value frame more than a wonky policy frame.

When talking about paid sick days, instead of saying, "We need to pass paid sick days legislation because more than 1.5 million Michigan workers aren't able to take a paid sick day when they're ill." we should say, "All working people should have time to recover from an illness or take care of a sick loved one without being shorted wages or getting laid off."

## Features v. Benefits





SAY: The villain is who we hold accountable. Villains directly oppose our values. They are committed to defeating our heroes and are who we must hold accountable.

This is so important for the narrative. If a story doesn't have a villain in it, the audience either won't believe it or they will provide their own – government, unions, undocumented Americans. We have to provide a villain that is true to what is happening in this state and one we can hold accountable for the threat.

We must be willing to name the villain whenever we can. If we don't name, then the threat will be seen as unchangeable, just "the way things are" or our opponents will supply one.

In Star Wars, the villain is Darth Vader.

For progressives, some of our epic villains are the Koch brothers.



SAY: The villain's weapons are how we talk about the other side's policy agenda and actions that spread injustice and drive down the power of participation. This is a powerful way to frame the other side.

In Star Wars, the villain's weapon is the Death Star.

In politics, when explaining a villain's power cycle, talk about money. Villains' weapons are more on the action side than policy and are framed around the villain archetypes - extremists, destructive industries, out of control capitalists, irresponsible corporate CEOs.

For example: When talking about policies to increase money in politics we want to highlight the action the villain is taking, "Out-of-control capitalists are hijacking our democracy." or "Out-of-control capitalists are rigging the system to their own selfish benefit."

Always make sure that when you're describing a villain that you talk about what they're doing and how they earned their villain status. If you're just yelling that someone is an extremist or out of control you can come off as shrill. We need to justify why we're calling them villains.

Talk about how villains are harming our heroes in every message.

# QUESTIONS





## THE FREE MARKET



Let's walk through some examples of how this works in real life campaigns.

One of the core quests of the conservative narrative is "A Free Market". 50 years ago this term didn't mean anything. Today it's a powerful quest that motivates many voters. Let's break down this quest and its epic story elements.

### **Threat:**

Socialism: redistributing wealth to the lazy instead of letting the free market reward the hard working and talented

Government waste: Taking your hard-earned money and wasting it on the bureaucracy and special interests

### **Heroes:**

Taxpayers  
Small businesses  
Property owners  
Budget hawks  
Entrepreneurs

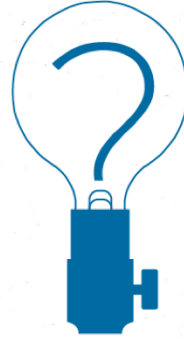
### **Heroes' Tools:**

Hard work and talent

## ACTIVITY: BREAK DOWN A NARRATIVE

QUEST	People leaving incarceration can re-integrate into the community	Providing primary healthcare to people experiencing homelessness	End homelessness
THREAT	That their record will prevent them from finding housing	Repeal of the ACA means people with low-incomes don't receive healthcare	Rising cost of housing and stagnating wages push people into homelessness  Not enough housing available
HERO	Advocates, people with lived experience; sometimes decision makers	Healthcare providers, people who need healthcare/clients, homeless students	

# QUESTIONS



## THANK YOU!

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Additional Resources:  
[www.heroesnarrative.org](http://www.heroesnarrative.org)  
[www.thecommunicationshub.org](http://www.thecommunicationshub.org)